To Whom Was the Bible Written?

(For the Salvation of the Japanese People)

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Nishikyushu Mission Station
Masaaki Sasaki

The apostle Paul truly fulfilled his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles. It was through his Spirit-led ministry that the understanding of the gospel, previously bound by Jewish nationalism, was liberated and transformed into a universal message for all peoples. We Gentile Christians owe him a deep debt of gratitude.

However, Paul's work as the apostle to the Gentiles lay primarily in the theological domain rather than in the practical field of evangelism. Indeed, he traveled widely through Gentile lands, far beyond Palestine. But most of those who actually heard and believed his gospel were already Judaized—both religiously and culturally. As a deliberate evangelistic strategy, Paul would first visit the Jewish synagogue in each town and speak to those present. The people he found there were Jews, Gentile converts to Judaism, and others who, even if not full converts, respected Judaism and had already accepted many aspects of Jewish culture.

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When we read the Acts of the Apostles and Paul' s letters, it becomes evident that he spoke to purely Gentile audiences—those with no knowledge of Jewish culture—on very rare occasions. Even individuals such as Sergius Paulus on the island of Cyprus or the jailer in Philippi, who seemingly had little familiarity with Judaism, witnessed miracles of God firsthand and were thus prepared and willing to listen.

The only recorded occasions when Paul addressed audiences made up entirely of Gentiles were in Lystra and Athens. In Lystra, he could do little more than deny that he and Barnabas were gods. In Athens, though only a few converted, his sermon remains a noteworthy demonstration of his role as an apostle to the Gentiles. Still,

his sermon in Athens reflects a certain lack of preparation for addressing Gentiles. In Corinth, where he stayed for a relatively long period, he struggled significantly with a congregation made up of many Gentiles. These difficulties are clearly evident in his letters to the Corinthians.

Paul's inability to produce lasting fruit in his ministry to genuine Gentiles is also illustrated by the winter he spent on the island of Malta. After surviving a shipwreck and arriving on Malta, he was bitten by a viper while warming himself at a fire but was unharmed. The islanders, astonished, began to call him a god. He healed many of the sick and was deeply respected, receiving generous provisions when he departed. Yet there is no mention of any conversions or of a church being formed. It's natural to assume that Paul preached the gospel fervently during his three-month stay, but it seems he was unable to reap a harvest worthy of mention. Among these rugged islanders, who had absolutely no Jewish cultural background, Paul could not achieve the same results he had among Judaized audiences.

Thus, while Paul made profound theological contributions regarding Gentiles, he was not yet effective in the actual work of evangelizing pure Gentiles. Moreover, even his theological foundation for Gentile evangelism was incomplete—it laid the groundwork but did not yet build the structure. It remained undeveloped and unrealized. Paul's inability to bear fruit in Malta underscores the fact that his theology for reaching completely non-Jewish people was still immature—and that it cannot be applied as-is to modern Japanese people. The Japanese live in a culture even more distant from Judaism than the people of Malta. They have independently developed a unique spiritual culture and religious consciousness, forged their own identity, and taken pride in it. It is inconceivable that they would simply accept a foreign religion brought in from abroad—even if Paul himself were to come.

We must now take the gospel that Paul laid the foundation for and develop it further—building up a theology for Gentiles. Though it may be long overdue, this is something that absolutely must be done. One of the major reasons evangelism in Japan has stalled is precisely because this has not yet been accomplished.

I. To Whom Was the Bible Written?

"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." (1 Timothy 2:11–12; cf. 1 Corinthians 14:34)

These are the words of the apostle Paul, written in the Bible and inspired by God. Even today, there are many churches and Christian groups that take these words at face value and forbid women from speaking in church. There are also many Christians who use these verses to justify sexist attitudes. Fortunately, it seems that such churches and Christians are gradually decreasing in number.

While it is true that these words were inspired by the Holy Spirit and written under divine authority, they were not addressed directly to us. Rather, they were spoken to people living in the first century and under the strong influence of Jewish culture. With that special historical and cultural context in mind, we must thoughtfully consider how to apply them to ourselves today, living in twenty-first-century Japan.

This should be common sense, and indeed, most Japanese Christians understand it well. If we do not know to whom the Bible was written, we cannot properly understand it—nor can we rightly apply it to our lives today. The Bible does not contain timeless, universal teachings that transcend time, culture, race, class, and gender. Everything in Scripture was written within specific historical and cultural contexts. If there is anything close to a universal command, it would be the greatest commandment spoken by Jesus: "Love the Lord your God" (Matthew 22:37). Yet even this commandment was originally given in the language of the Jews and addressed to them. In order to properly understand it, we need to examine what the word "love" meant to the Jews of that time. Nevertheless, despite the ethnic and temporal limitations—despite the language barrier and its origin in a context over 3,000 years ago—this command to love God carries a degree of universality that allows it to be applied to everyone.

The second commandment mentioned by Jesus, "Love your neighbor" (Matthew 22:39), requires even greater care when applying it. At the time it was written, "neighbor" referred to fellow Jews. To interpret it now as referring to "all people other than oneself" demands serious theological reflection. Christians, evangelists, and pastors who have studied the Bible thoroughly are generally aware of this nuance. And yet, in practice, it is often forgotten or ignored.

Even more problematic is the way in which the Old Testament—written entirely for the Jewish people—is often treated lightly. The language used was the language of the Jews. In fact, most of the New Testament was also written for Jews or for Gentile Christians who had already adopted much of the Jewish religious and cultural worldview. Even if they were not Jews by ethnicity, early Christians in the New Testament era were heavily influenced by Jewish religion and culture. Therefore, it is not correct for modern-day Japanese readers to assume the Bible was written directly to them. Application is always necessary.

Some teachings may require bridging a vast canyon to apply, while others may only require crossing a small stream. But regardless of the size of the gap, application is always necessary. Simply handing the Bible to an unbelieving Japanese person and asking them to read it will rarely result in genuine understanding. More often than not, the reader will fail to bridge the cultural and historical divide, and dismiss it as an irrelevant book from ancient times. Conversely, some Christians read the Bible as though it were "a letter from God" addressed directly to them, disregarding the cultural and historical context, and fall into subjective misinterpretations.

In fact, such misunderstandings are quite common. Missionaries who came to Japan were no exception, and the same can be said of Western Christians and theologians. They all read the Bible as if it had been written directly to them. It seems few have ever considered just how serious a mistake this is—and how much of a stumbling block it has become in evangelism.

Among these misunderstandings, the most serious and far-reaching is the issue of "sin." The Bible addresses sin throughout all its pages. Most of the sins mentioned in the Bible are violations of the Law—that is, sins defined by breaking the commandments given in the Old Testament. And as already discussed, the Old Testament was given specifically to the Jewish people. While there are parts of the Old Testament that deal with universal matters and can be applied to all people, when it comes to the Law, there is a clear distinction between those to whom the Law was given and those to whom it was not. Only the Jews, to whom the Law was entrusted, are bound by it (Romans 2:12). Breaking that Law is considered sin, and it is through awareness of that sin—made clear by the Law—that one can receive the

atonement of the Savior with gratitude. In that sense, the Law is a guide leading people to salvation; Paul even calls it a "tutor" (Galatians 3:24).

Then what about those to whom the Law was not given—do they have no sin? Not at all. As it says, "All who sin apart from the Law will also perish apart from the Law" (Romans 2:12). Even without the Law, sin still exists. Paul goes on to say that if Gentiles, who do not have the Law, do by nature what the Law requires, then they are a law to themselves. He explains that the requirements of the Law are written on their hearts (Romans 2:12–15). Even Gentiles, who were not given the Old Testament, have been given and possess a different law—one written on the heart. Therefore, Gentiles should not be judged by the Law of the Old Testament. Those who were not given the Law will be judged not by that Law, but by the "law written on their hearts."

Regrettably, as mentioned earlier, Paul's theology for the Gentiles—the theology he laid as a foundation—was never developed beyond that. Since his actual missionary work rarely involved pure Gentiles, he may not have felt a strong need to develop a theology specifically for them. As a result, Gentile theology remained underdeveloped. This is why Paul's brief mention of the "law written on their hearts," so important to a theology for the Gentiles and to evangelism among them, is left undeveloped and never returned to.

Nevertheless, this passage clearly shows that we must not treat Japanese unbelievers—who are also true Gentiles—as sinners by applying the Law of the Old Testament to them. In fact, we should not apply even the teachings of the New Testament in such a way as to declare them sinners. Confronting people with the harsh ethical standards of the Old Testament and condemning them as sinners may have been something Jesus did with the Jews, but for us to do the same with the Japanese is a mistake. Japanese, as Gentiles, must be led to a recognition of sin not by the written Law, but through the "law written on their hearts"—that is, through the innate moral sense God has given them, through their own conscience (Romans 2:14–15).

Then what does Paul mean when he says, "They are a law to themselves," and what are "the requirements of the law written on their hearts"? The Bible offers no other explicit mention of this idea. Therefore, establishing a full theological system based on just these few verses is quite difficult. Yet, it is not impossible. It would be wrong

to build a theology from a single verse in a way that contradicts the broader teachings of Scripture. However, if that verse can be harmonized with many other teachings in the Bible, then it may be considered a theologically valid interpretation.

Paul's phrases—"the requirements of the law written on their hearts," and "they are a law to themselves"—can be understood as referring to the fundamental goodness inherent in human beings. Because this is said to be universally present in all people, it cannot be something acquired through education or environment; rather, it should be understood as something innate—part of the original design of humanity. In other words, it is a fundamental aspect of human nature. This original nature is clearly indicated in the Genesis account: "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). When humans were created, a nature resembling God's own was instilled in them. That nature, this innate goodness, remains as a kind of internal law. Human beings, by possessing this nature, function as their own moral guide.

Some forms of Protestant theology emphasize human depravity to the point of denying any remaining good in humans after the fall, doing so in order to magnify God's grace in salvation. They speak as though every good quality was utterly lost through Adam and Eve's fall. But Scripture assumes that even after the fall, some degree of goodness remains in humanity. When Paul says, "Nothing good dwells in me," he is speaking from his personal experience of sin and conviction, not making a universal statement about human nature as a whole (Romans 7:18).

Human beings, created in the image of God, were inherently endowed with several key traits—each one noble and godlike. The most fundamental of these is our spiritual nature. Because of it, humans differ from all animals in possessing spiritual sensitivity and the ability to perceive spiritual realities. This allows us to sense God and other spiritual beings. Then there is our moral nature—our innate sense of purity that recoils from impurity. This underpins our sense of righteousness and justice, and gives us the ability to understand and choose what is right. We were also created with a nature of love. To love and be loved is at the core of human life. There are certainly other important traits we could mention upon further reflection. But together, these qualities—given to us as bearers of God's image—form our essential human character and nature.

Even if distorted or suppressed by sin or under the dominion of Satan, this God-given nature remains in all mentally and physically healthy human beings. It

transcends culture. This is what we understand to be “a law to themselves.” Paul also refers in the same passage to the “conscience” (v.15). Though this word appears only once in this brief section, and we must therefore be cautious in drawing definitive conclusions, it can be understood as a culturally formed ethical awareness shaped by one’s God-given moral nature.

Even though all human beings share the same instinct to love, the ways in which love is expressed differ from culture to culture. Similarly, value judgments on particular actions also vary. In a culture like the Philippines, where familial and kinship ties are regarded as the highest moral priority—where relationships by blood surpass almost all else—it is not uncommon to view even theft as "good" if done to support one's family. On the other hand, in Japan, while human relationships are certainly respected, personal dignity and individual responsibility are emphasized even more. As a result, the idea of stealing for the sake of one's family, though it might arouse sympathy, is ultimately rejected as morally unacceptable.

In the United States, a culture rooted in individualism and the value of establishing personal identity, it is unthinkable for a thirty-year-old to still be financially dependent on their parents. Such a situation would be considered shameful and would weigh heavily on one’s conscience. In contrast, in Japan’s collectivist culture, where mutual reliance is seen as a virtue, one would feel no such pang of conscience. In fact, it is considered natural for parents to support their children well into adulthood.

In this way, the conscience is shaped by the surrounding environment—particularly cultural influences—even though it originates from human nature. It is not universal in form or content, but it is rooted in a common moral foundation. Thus, if we dig deep enough, we can trace various expressions of conscience back to a universal, original human nature.

Now, returning to the foundational truth: the Bible was originally written for people who lived within Jewish culture—or at least for people who had significantly adopted that culture. It was not written for Gentiles like the Japanese. This is a principle we must not forget.

The Bible declares that “all have sinned.” In this context, “all” truly means all—both Jews and Gentiles. However, the sins of the Jews are to be judged according to the

Law, while the sins of the Gentiles are not judged by the Law. Christ came to save sinners, and in that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. He came for all sinners.

In order for someone to acknowledge Christ as the Christ—that is, as their Savior—they must first be made aware of their sin. For the Jews, this awareness came through the Law. But for Gentiles, it comes not through the Law, but through the law written on their hearts. In other words, the awareness of sin in Gentiles comes not through the Mosaic Law but through the innate moral sense that reflects the image of God in them. Therefore, it is a mistake to try to bring the Japanese to repentance by presenting the Old Testament Law or New Testament ethics. Such an approach to evangelism is misguided. How many Japanese people have stumbled and turned away from Christianity because of this method? If we are to reach the Japanese, we must speak to their hearts, appeal to their conscience, and awaken what is already within them.

Many Christians—including pastors, missionaries, and ordinary believers—bring out biblical teachings to point out the ethical inferiority, ambiguity, or weakness of the Japanese moral system. But in doing so, they ignore the fact that, unlike many Western nations, Japan did not have the Bible. Westerners, having inherited a long Christian history, possess an ethical system shaped by both the Old and New Testaments. Though most of them were originally Gentiles, they now read the Bible as if it had been given directly to them. Then, using the Bible, they make the grave mistake of judging the Japanese—who had no access to the Bible until recently. Japanese Christians, having been taught by such Westerners, likewise take up the Bible and judge their fellow Japanese in the same way.

Let me repeat: we must not judge the Japanese using the Bible. It would be just as absurd as using French law to prosecute a Japanese citizen, or judging a Japanese person based on Russian notions of conscience. This applies not only to the Japanese, but to any people group who have not received the Bible. Those who do not possess the Scriptures should be judged according to the law written on their hearts—that is, by the divine image in which they were created. Moreover, such judgment must be in consideration of their conscience.

Therefore, when we attempt to present biblical truth and share the gospel with the Japanese—who do not have the written Law but do have the law inscribed upon their

hearts—we must not speak to them as if they were already knowledgeable about Scripture. Instead, we should speak to their God-given nature, awakening the law written in their hearts. We must speak through the created world, making the invisible God's eternal attributes known. This is because the creation itself not only reveals God's character but also contains His presence within it (Ephesians 4:6). Through creation, God has made His nature knowable—His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature—are clearly revealed through what He

II. Helping the Japanese Become Aware of Sin

For salvation to occur, even the Japanese must come to an awareness of sin. Without such awareness, there can be no repentance; and without repentance, there is no New Testament concept of the forgiveness of sins. At the very least, those of us who inherit evangelical theology have been taught this.

Then how should we begin to speak so that the Japanese may come to a realization of sin? Simply waving the Bible around and crying "Sin! Sin!"—or trying to prompt guilty memories of, say, sneaking a 100-yen coin from one's mother's purse as a child—will rarely lead a Japanese person to genuine conviction. True awareness of sin arises only when one comes into the presence of a truly holy being.

We Christians, shaped by Western Christian theology, have viewed the Japanese through a Western theological lens. As a result, we have often concluded that the Japanese do not know "a holy God." After all, they do not have the Bible, nor do they possess knowledge of the Creator God—the absolute one. It is true that Japanese people lack the kind of intellectual understanding of God that many Western Christians have. However, intellectual understanding is not the only form of knowing. One could say that the Japanese "sense" the absolute, intuitively—apart from biblical knowledge.

Those who have studied Western Christianity, as well as rational and intellectual Japanese, may easily dismiss the idea of ″eight million gods″ as foolish. The concept of countless gods is often seen as a vulgarized form of ancient Japanese pantheism—one that is difficult for reason to accept. These gods are primarily viewed as targets for wishes or desires. When those desires are fulfilled, people may offer thanks—but such beings are rarely regarded with reverence or worship. This is why, even if many Japanese engage in wish-making at shrines, they do not actually

revere the gods as objects of true worship. Such gods are deemed unworthy of being honored by beings as exalted as humankind.

And yet, even Japanese who claim to be irreligious—who profess no particular belief—do not speak ill of faith itself. Without feeling any contradiction, they freely visit Shinto shrines. Whether it's a tiny roadside shrine or a grand sacred precinct, they approach with sincere hearts, join their hands, and direct themselves toward something beyond themselves. In those moments, many Japanese imagine a vague, uncertain being—someone they cannot quite define. And yet, they feel that this being is one they should thank, one before whom they should bow, one who evokes in them a sense of impurity and unworthiness. In the presence of this being, they feel the weight of their own inadequacy—unfit even to offer proper worship.

Moreover, whether it be a small roadside shrine or a grand imperial sanctuary, the Japanese approach both with the same heartfelt reverence. Though each Shinto shrine is said to enshrine a particular deity, most people show little interest in exactly which god is honored there. Regardless of the shrine, they offer their respects with the same attitude, bowing their heads and clapping their hands as though worshiping a single, unified being. Although the Japanese are often described as polytheists who believe in many gods, deep within their hearts there lies a strong monotheistic consciousness.

Many Japanese have lived their lives "sensing" such a presence. They may not clearly distinguish whether this being is a mere "presence" or a personal "being," nor whether this presence is identical to nature or distinct from it. Nevertheless, they have long felt that this presence has given them life, nurtured them, provided them with food, clothing, and all other needs—that it is vast, powerful, compassionate, gentle, generous, and delighted in the lives of human beings. And when they come before this presence, without any reasoning or explanation, they are simply moved to say, "Thank you," or "How deeply I am blessed."

Long ago, the poet-priest Saigyō visited the Grand Shrine of Ise. Fully aware that the shrine was dedicated to Amaterasu-ōmikami, the sun goddess, he composed the following poem:

**“Though I know not what dwells here,
awe overwhelms me—
and tears fall from my eyes.”**

This poem captures the heart of many Japanese people. Even if the shrine is said to enshrine Amaterasu, a solar deity, the reality they intuit is something beyond—a transcendent being, invisible and unknowable to human reason.

The Japanese are a people who do not make idols. They worship the invisible God as invisible. Nor do they, like many Westerners, offer elaborate theological explanations of God. To express the infinite God using flawed human words and ideas feels, to them, as if they are carving idols—not physically, but conceptually—and treating the divine too lightly. Shinto, Japan's ancient religion and spiritual foundation, is a faith that does not produce images. Since the arrival of Buddhism, some popular religious practices have introduced idols, but such cases remain exceptions. The tradition of avoiding idol-making is, in fact, a most unusual and noteworthy trait.

After the introduction of Buddhism to Japan, a more popularized form of Shinto emerged through its syncretism with Buddhism. At the same time, efforts were made to protect and preserve Shinto by creating various myths to support the religious and national identity. These myths are recorded in Japan's earliest historical chronicles, such as the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. However, any attempt to describe the invisible God through storytelling inevitably edges toward idolatry. These stories portray the glorious, unseen God as being no different—or sometimes even inferior—to humans, depicted as foolish and petty figures. Fortunately, in Shinto tradition, these myths are preserved merely as "origin stories" (*iware*), and not regarded as literal truth. The gods described in them are not carved into images or worshiped as idols.

When Paul spoke of Gentile religions, he strongly condemned their idolatry. In Romans 1:18-32, he accused the Gentiles of exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and animals. However, unlike many modern Christians, Paul did not quote the first of the Ten Commandments in this condemnation. He understood that the Decalogue was given only to the Jews, and it would have been inappropriate to apply it to Gentiles. Paul never judged Gentiles by the Law of Moses. Instead, he judged them by the law that was also given to them—the law written on their hearts.

In contrast, Shinto—the indigenous religion of Japan—does not fit neatly into Paul's description of Gentile idolatry. Japanese spirituality affirms the presence of divine reality within all of nature. While nature is honored and treated with reverence, it is rarely mistaken for the divine itself. Rather, elements of nature are seen as vessels or symbols that carry divine significance. They may be revered, but they are not deified. For example, when people greet the rising sun with bowed heads, they are not worshiping the sun itself. Instead, they are acknowledging the sacredness it symbolizes—the profound power that gives life to all things. Behind the sun, they sense a great, noble, merciful being who gives life to everything in the universe. In traditional Japanese terms, they offer thanks to *Otentō-sama*—"the Lord of Heaven."

The Japanese recognize, through creation, "God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20). Moreover, they have not "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles" (Romans 1:23). Though Buddhist influence has introduced some elements of idolatry into Japanese thought, the ancient core of Japanese spirituality—embodied in Shinto—has remained fundamentally iconoclastic.

As we have seen, what is often broadly referred to as "Shinto" contains within it a remarkably high religious awareness—or, more precisely, a profound consciousness of the divine. Rather than using the Bible to condemn the Japanese as sinners, we should appeal to this religious sensitivity and the ethical values that arise from it in order to help them become aware of sin.

The moral conscience of the Japanese continues to astonish people around the world. In fact, it is often regarded as equal to—or even higher than—that of many so-called "Christian nations." This conscience is not merely a matter of public manners; it extends to a profound public spirit revealed in times of disaster, and even to conduct in extreme conditions like war.

There are certainly voices that accuse Japan of war crimes and highlight the brutality of the Japanese people during the war. However, much of that narrative is now being recognized as historically distorted or as political propaganda, primarily shaped by the victorious Allied nations—especially the United States. More and more

evidence is coming to light showing how economic sanctions and blockades pushed Japan toward war. We are also gaining greater awareness of how, from the Age of Exploration until recent times, many Western Christian countries expanded colonial rule with severe racial discrimination, subjecting vast numbers of Asians, Africans, and indigenous Americans to suffering and even mass slaughter. In comparison, Japan's wartime actions, while not to be excused, seem to fade in severity. (This is not to downplay Japan's wrongdoing, but to acknowledge perspective.)

So then, how is it that the Japanese—who neither possessed the Bible nor knew God's Law—have been able to maintain a level of ethics and morality equal to, or greater than, those in nations that do?

According to Paul's explanation in Romans, the moral decline of humanity across the world is not solely the result of Adam and Eve's sin. Rather, it is because of the sin of idolatry that people have come under God's wrath. Paul writes: "Although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened… They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles… Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts…" (Romans 1:21–24, and following)
The sin of idolatry may be called "the second fall." Because of it, God gave people over to depravity, leading to every form of impurity and wickedness, especially sexual corruption.

The reason Japan has not fallen into such moral collapse, as so many other nations have, must be attributed to the mercy and grace of God. But behind that grace lies a historical reality: the Japanese did not plunge into the folly of idolatry. Instead, they worshiped the invisible God without making Him visible. They reverently honored the infinite, ineffable God without trying to define Him in words or to reduce Him to human understanding. Rather than crafting a theology of God based on speculative reasoning—as in much of Western theology influenced by Greek philosophy—they maintained an attitude of awe and gratitude.

We must acknowledge and affirm this deep religious sensibility—the Japanese view of the divine—and speak to it with respect. Most Japanese are not even aware of how elevated their concept of God actually is. Even Christians often fail to recognize it, having been taught through a Western lens to regard Shinto-like intuitions as

primitive or inferior. They have carelessly ridiculed and dismissed these spiritual intuitions without understanding them.

What we Christians must do first is to recognize the excellence of the Japanese people's innate sense of the divine. Then we must help the Japanese themselves rediscover and awaken to it. We need to speak to their hearts—hearts that already harbor a noble consciousness of God.

Let us gently explain to them that this great, invisible, compassionate, and powerful being—the one who gives life to all living things and sustains us—is the very same God whom we Christians call the "Creator of heaven and earth," and whom we worship as "our God." Let us invite them to reflect on how much grace and provision they have received from this God, and how little gratitude they may have expressed in return. Let us help them realize that despite being protected, nurtured, and blessed in countless ways, they may never have directly turned to this invisible God to say, "Thank you."

We Japanese have lived all our lives receiving abundant blessings. We've been nurtured, protected, and sustained. And yet, we may recognize now that we have rarely expressed our gratitude. We may come to see that we have been ungrateful toward the unseen One. And with that realization comes a desire to make amends—somehow, somewhere, in some form.

There is a story of a man who had caused his parents endless trouble—never calling, never visiting—and who missed their death entirely. Later, as he grew older, he collapsed in tears at their gravesite, overcome with remorse. In the same way, we Japanese may one day come to acknowledge that we have been unfilial—not toward our earthly parents, but toward God. To express that remorse, as one might for failing one's parents, is a vital step in entering a right relationship with God. And perhaps, without even being told, many Japanese have already sensed this. That is why, each spring and autumn, they have conducted festivals of gratitude and performed acts of offering.

For the Japanese, it may be more natural—not to "repent" of some undefined concept called "sin," but rather to apologize for their ingratitude and irreverence toward the Creator. In fact, such an approach touches the very heart of what sin is. And then, instead of portraying Christian faith as a set of doctrines to be accepted

intellectually—as is often the case in Western Protestant theology—we can present it as the restoration of a right relationship with God. We can show them that faith is not about ideas, but about connection—a heart-to-heart relationship with the Divine.

承知しました。では、「Ⅲ. アブラハムのように」の翻訳をお届けいたします。

III. Like Abraham

When the apostle Paul—called to be an apostle to the Gentiles—explained salvation by faith, he used Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish people, as a model. In order to argue that both Jews and Gentiles are saved not by works but by faith, Paul cited the verse from Genesis: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Abraham was not declared righteous because of any good deeds. He was declared righteous simply because he believed in God—because he trusted in Him. He believed God's promise and relied upon Him.

Notably, when Paul references Abraham's faith, he does not say that "Abraham repented," nor that "Abraham believed in Christ," nor even that "he believed Christ died on the cross for his sins." Of course, Abraham lived two thousand years before Christ, and could not have known about Him. Nor had the Law been given in his time, so he had never been taught about sin through the Law, nor did he know anything about repentance. He knew nothing of the redemptive death of the Son of God for all sinners. He was simply declared righteous because he believed in God. He was justified not by believing in Christ, but by believing in God.

This logic that Paul uses is extremely important for those who do not know Christ—for Gentiles like us. While Paul generally argues within a Jewish framework—based on the Law and the fulfillment of that Law in Christ—when he sets out to prove that salvation comes by faith alone, he cites Abraham's faith, which was not faith in Christ, but faith in God. For Paul, Christ is God—He is Adonai of the Old Testament, Yahweh, and the Lord of the New. Thus, Paul felt no contradiction in equating faith in God with faith in Christ, and saw no need to explain the equivalence.

The early Christians, including Paul, had a Jewish understanding of faith—shaped and bound by the Law. Naturally, within that framework, they emphasized the promised Messiah foretold in the Law and the redemptive work fulfilled by Christ. That

perspective became the foundation of the faith of Western Christian nations, and was spread around the world. Although Western Christians were originally Gentiles, many no longer see themselves that way, and their faith perspective has been passed on to Japan without adaptation.

However, in his letter to the Romans, Paul—perhaps uniquely—emphasizes faith in God even more than faith in Christ. As mentioned earlier, Paul seems to use the two interchangeably, leaving the matter unresolved. It is at this point that we must go beyond Paul's Gentile theology—not to contradict it, but to build upon it. If we are to reach thoroughly non-Jewish people like the Japanese, we must construct a theology that builds on Paul's foundation and continues the work he began.

According to Paul's teaching on salvation, Abraham did not need to know or understand Christ. He also did not need to be aware of sin or repentance, nor did he need to understand the work of atonement. Even though Abraham knew none of these things, God knew everything. And that was enough.

Salvation did not come through what Abraham knew or how much he understood—it was not a result of intellectual grasp. Rather, salvation was accomplished through the atoning work that God intended to fulfill through Christ. Salvation does not come by understanding, but by simple trust in God. Trust is a matter not of intellect, but of the heart. And our God, who is rich in mercy, delights far more in being trusted than in being understood. He does not expect finite human beings to fully comprehend the infinite. Salvation by faith is salvation through relationship—through trust.

Let there be no misunderstanding: this does not mean that Christ was unnecessary for Abraham's salvation. Abraham was saved only because of Christ's atoning death on the cross. However, during Abraham's lifetime, only God knew of Christ and His future redemptive work. Abraham himself had no knowledge of it. Yet, because of that unknown atonement and because he trusted in God, Abraham was declared righteous and was saved.

So what about the Japanese—who, like Abraham, do not possess the Law and do not know Christ? Must we continue to say to them, as if they were Jews, "Believe in Christ! Repent of your sins!"? Or should we begin by telling them about the Creator of heaven and earth?

If salvation is possible without knowledge of Christ, then there is no need to speak of Christ at the very outset. What the Japanese need is not belief in the *foreign figure* of Jesus Christ, but trust in the great, noble, strong, and gentle One whom they have long sensed in their hearts—the One they revere when they become quiet and reflective. If they live in dependence on this One, expressing that dependence through prayer, praise, and worship, and if they confirm it by living lives that please Him, then that is enough. For faith always manifests in action.

The One whom the Japanese are to trust in is none other than the God who has always been with them—the One they have long honored and respected. The Japanese have sensed that this God is far too noble, too lofty, too great to be casually defined. Out of reverence, they have refrained from probing too deeply, from trying to name or describe Him. They have worshiped Him in silence, without demanding to understand Him.

This God, who says "I AM," is revealed to us in the Bible. He is also called the Creator of heaven and earth. If the Japanese can realize that the One they have intuitively worshiped in their hearts is in fact the Creator of all things, that is enough. The Creator is also called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Years ago, after a Christian woman I knew well passed away and was taken to the Lord, her husband finally decided to become a Christian. When he prayed for the first time, unsure of how to address God, he said, "The God whom Minako believed in…"—invoking his wife's name to identify God. That was enough. At first, that is more than enough.

IV. Why Only Japan?

Even so, evangelism in Japan remains extremely difficult. Recently, I happened upon statistics for Sunday worship attendance across the worldwide Assemblies of God churches. The number reportedly exceeds 56 million. Attendance is growing rapidly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Of course, as with many "official figures," there is likely some exaggeration. But in stark contrast, the average weekly attendance in Assemblies of God churches in Japan barely exceeds ten thousand. It's a number that defies explanation.

There must be many reasons behind this situation. One of them, without doubt, is the misunderstanding about to whom the Bible was originally written—an issue we've explored at length. Yet even in regions where Christianity has spread rapidly, this

same misunderstanding surely exists. And still, only Japan lags behind so significantly. Why?

It is because, at the time Christianity was first introduced, Japan had already formed a unified national identity, a shared culture, and the structure of a sovereign state. In contrast, many of the peoples who accepted Christianity under colonial influence lacked the power to resist imperial forces. They had no strong national structure, no unifying religious identity, no shared culture, and no advanced technological development. They were quickly subdued and converted by force or convenience. This was the case in much of the world.

Let us take the Philippines as a classic example. Ferdinand Magellan brought Roman Catholicism to the Philippines in 1521. At that time, the Philippines was not yet a unified nation. It was made up of more than a hundred tribal groups, each with its own language and lifestyle. Though there were some shared cultural elements and loose cooperation among the islands, there was no national consciousness or cohesive state.

As a result, even though Magellan himself was killed soon after landing—slain by Chief Lapu-Lapu on the small island of Mactan, right next to Cebu—the Spanish quickly took control of the surrounding islands. They named the territory "Las Islas Filipinas" after King Philip II of Spain. More than that, the people readily accepted the Catholic faith brought by these foreign invaders—without much resistance and even with a sense of joy. Thus, the Philippines became a Catholic country.

The idol that Magellan had brought with him as a personal charm—*Santo Niño*, the "Holy Child"—was an image representing the Christ child. Today, replicas of that image are found in almost every Filipino home, functioning as a kind of protective charm. Whether it's a truck, a bus, or a private car, almost all vehicles in the Philippines are decorated with miniature versions of *Santo Niño*.

Catholicism arrived in Japan—roughly thirty years after it had reached the Philippines—Japan had already formed a unified national structure and possessed the spirit and determination to resist the military power of the West. The Japanese

rulers of the time recognized that Catholicism carried behind it the forces of Spanish colonialism, and they proceeded to eliminate the Catholic influence entirely.

The next arrival of Christianity in Japan came during the Meiji Restoration. This time, Catholicism and Protestantism landed almost simultaneously. Although Japan was behind the West in terms of military strength and technological advancement, it was by no means inferior in terms of its spiritual and cultural depth. Therefore, Japan's leaders adopted the slogan *wakon-yōsai*—"Japanese spirit, Western learning"—choosing to import only the scientific and intellectual aspects of Western civilization while firmly rejecting its spiritual or religious elements.

The reason why the Japanese leadership rejected Western Christianity and instead established Shinto—the traditional Japanese spirit—as the pillar of the nation was because they recognized Christianity as the religion of colonial powers that were extending their influence into Japan at that time. The Japanese had studied what these Western Christian colonial nations had done throughout the world. They understood well the cruelty and inhumanity of such regimes and judged that Christianity was not suitable for the Japanese people.

Thus, while Western Christianity made great inroads among many developing nations and tribal peoples, it stalled in Japan. Christianity, shaped by Jewish culture and reconstructed through Western civilization—a religion associated with invasion, warfare, slaughter, and oppression—could not be embraced by a people whose cultural and spiritual foundation is summarized in the phrase *"Harmony is to be valued above all."*

What we seek to proclaim is not a Christianity that justified conquest and bloodshed through the Old Testament, but a Christianity that believes in and worships the God of love, the God of peace, the God of mercy and grace. To do this, we must speak to the Japanese—Gentiles—about our God by using the law that is written on the hearts of the Gentiles.

Conclusion

The New Testament clearly states that there is another kind of law—one that is not from the Old Testament. As an evangelist and missionary, I have read the Bible more

than most ordinary Christians, and I had memorized the book of Romans during my seminary years. I was also aware of what is written in the first and second chapters of Romans. However, it is only recently—when I began to seriously consider how to bring the gospel to the Japanese, who are Gentiles—that I began to pay close attention to these verses and reflect deeply on their significance.

Perhaps it is due to my own lack of study, but I have never come across writings that deal with this point. Nor have I heard any sermons that address it. If we are to take the mission to the Gentiles seriously, then we must also firmly construct a theology of the gospel for the Gentiles. Paul laid the foundation. It is now up to us to build the house upon it. I sincerely hope that those who are theologically equipped will contribute to this task.